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ABSTRACT

This pamphlet offers information on high school dropouts and the role of vocational education in dropout prevention. References are provided for each section. Characteristics of dropouts, reasons for dropping out, and 12 factors that contribute to retention in high school are listed. Indicators from research are cited that show that vocational education does have retentive ability. Advantages to altering the traditional school environment are then highlighted. Effective teaching techniques, as shown by recent research, are listed. Characteristics of effective programs according to directors of exemplary programs are identified. Programmatic considerations that have been found to be effective in reducing dropout rates are then described. The pamphlet concludes by listing vocational education practices in Illinois that respond to the needs identified by dropouts. (YLB)

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The High School Drop Out: Vocational Education Can Help

Illinois State Board of Education

Department of Adult, Vocational and Technical Education

Students reported that their vocational program was an important factor in developing a positive self image. These students felt that vocational education increased their skills in:

problem solving, learning to listen, human relations, and getting along with others.

(Carvell & Carvell, 1981)

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Voc Ed Can Make a Difference

The High School Drop Out: Vocational Education Can Help

The High School Drop Out: Vocational Education Can Help

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Table of Contents

Characteristics of Dropouts 1

Reasons For Dropping Out 2

What Do Students Say? 3

How Many Leave School? 4

The Dropout Problem 4

Does Vocational Education Make A Difference? 4

Can Vocational Educators Help? 5

Suggested Practices 6

Effective Teaching Techniques 6-7

Characteristics of Effective Programs 8
- Affective Characteristics
- Content Characteristics
- Teaching Characteristics

Programmatic Considerations 9-10

The Illinois Response 10

Characteristics of Dropouts

A large volume of research has been conducted to identify the major characteristics of high school dropouts. Although the data has been useful in identifying students by the time they legally drop out of school, it has been less effective in identifying students who are in trouble at a sufficiently early age to give them the help they need to stay in school. Given these limitations, a profile of high school dropouts is given below.

Characteristics of the Individual

History of school absenteeism
Poor grades
Low math and reading scores
Low self-concept
History of behavior problems
Inability to identify with other people
Employed full time while in school
Low socioeconomic background
More males than females
Tend to be members of a minority group
Feel alienated and isolated

Characteristics of the Family

Family with several siblings
Father absent from the home
Father unemployed
Father did not complete high school
Mother absent from the home in early adolescence
Little reading material in the home

References

Mertens, D. M., Seitz, P. & Cox, S. (1982). *Vocational Education and the High School Dropout*. Columbus, OH: The National Center for Research in Vocational Education.

Weber, J. M. & Silvani-Lacey. (1983). *Building Basic Skills: The Dropout*. Columbus, OH: The National Center for Research in Vocational Education.

Reasons For Dropping Out

It is difficult to accurately assess the reasons students drop out from high school. Students generally give socially acceptable reasons or stereotyped explanations for leaving school. Students may be unable to conceptualize and articulate the historical, interpersonal dynamics that led to the decision to drop out. Males frequently cite different reasons for dropping out than females. It has been found that the "real" reasons students leave school are quite different than the stereotyped answers often given.

Males Say They Drop Out Because . . .
Poor grades
Didn't like school
Needed work
Didn't get along with teachers
Suspended, expelled
Needed to support family

Females Say They Drop Out Because . . .
Marriage
Didn't like school
Pregnancy
Needed work
Didn't get along with teachers

The Real Reasons Students Leave School . . .
Isolation
Boredom
Dissonance
Irrelevancy

References

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Resta, M. & Temple, J. (1978). *Dropout Rates Among Students Enrolled in New Mexico Secondary Vocational Education Programs*. Albuquerque, NM: Institute for Applied Research Services, University of New Mexico.

Rumberger, R. (1981). *Why Kids Drop Out of High School*. Stanford, CA: Institute for Research on Educational Finance and Governance.

What Do Students Say?

Students report that there are twelve factors that contribute to retention in high school. These factors are:

- Financial aid
- Support from other students
- Realistic training related to jobs
- Counseling services
- Program meets expectations
- Teachers talk to students as equals
- Teachers are approachable
- Learning outcomes are clearly defined
- Methods are appropriate for the task
- Sequence of learning is defined and communicated
- Rules are established and communicated
- Performance standards are clearly indicated

References

Batsche, Catherine. (1985). Indicators of Effective Programming for School to Work Transition Skills Among Dropouts. *The Journal for Vocational Special Needs Education, 7* (3).

Carvell, F. & Carvell, J. (1981). *A Study of the Non-traditional and Social Impact of Vocational Education on Individuals in Illinois.* Springfield, IL: Illinois State Board of Education, Department of Adult, Vocational, and Technical Education.

Lam, Y. & Wong, A. (1974). Attendance regularity of adult learners: An examination of content and structural factors. *Adult Education, 24,* 130-142.

How Many Leave School?

There is a large variance in the percentage of students who leave school. The average dropout rate is frequently given as 26%. However, the rate is as high as 50% in some urban areas. The majority of dropouts leave school in the eleventh grade, most typically at the age of 16 or 17.

The Dropout Problem

Within two years, most students report that leaving school was not a good decision. The unemployment rates for dropouts are twice as high as those for high school graduates and three times as high as those for college graduates. Most dropouts hold jobs as unskilled laborers and report that they are dissatisfied with their work. Males who drop out experience more weeks of unemployment and work fewer hours per week than graduates. Females who drop out receive lower hourly pay than graduates.

Does Vocational Education Make A Difference?

Is vocational education effective in reducing the dropout rate? Although the results of research are mixed, there are several indicators that vocational education does have retentive ability.

It has been found that:

Potential dropouts are more likely to complete tenth grade if they are in vocational education classes.

The dropout rate of students enrolled in business education classes is lower than that of students enrolled in general education classes.

The more vocational classes potential dropouts take, the less likely they are to drop out of school.

Work-study and cooperative education programs motivate potential dropouts to attend school more frequently than general academic programs.

Pre-vocational programs reduce the dropout rate when the program focuses on clarifying career goals

through vocational exploration and on improvement of basic skills.

The availability of a trade and industrial program in a high school is associated with a low dropout rate.

Vocational education contributes to the development of a positive self-image among potential dropouts.

References

Carvell, F. & Carvell, J. (1981). *A Study of the Non-traditional and Social Impact of Vocational Education on Individuals in Illinois.* Springfield, IL: Illinois State Board of Education, Department of Adult, Vocational, and Technical Education.

Grasso, J. & Shea, J. (1979). *Vocational Education Training: Impact on Youth.* Berkley, CA: The Carnegie Council on Policy Studies in Higher Education.

Herrnstadt, I.L., Horowitz, M.A., & Sam, A.M. (1979). *The Transition From School to Work: The Contribution of Cooperative Education Programs at the Secondary Level.* Boston, MA: Northeastern University.

Mertens, D.M., McElwain, D., Garcia, G. & Whitmore, M. (1980). *Effects of Participating in Vocational Education.* Columbus, OH: The National Center for Research in Vocational Education.

Can Vocational Educators Help?

Definitely! Educators can create an environment that is conducive to retention in high school. There are several advantages to altering the traditional school environment:

Alteration of the school environment for students with differing needs has the potential to improve the school for *all* students.

Changing the school environment will reduce the number of students who express behavior problems in school.

Improvement in the environment helps students assume responsibility for their own behavior.

References

Maurer, R. (1982, March). Dropout Prevention: An Intervention Strategy for Today's High Schools. *Phi Delta Kappan.*

Peng, S. & Takai, R. (1983). *High School and Beyond.* Washington, D.C.: National Center for Educational Statistics.

Suggested Practices

The results of recent research give a clear indication of the teaching techniques considered to be most effective in dropout prevention programs. These practices were reported by students, teachers, and program directors as having a positive impact on retention in school.

Effective Teaching Techniques

Establish rules and communicate them clearly to students.

Identify learning outcomes and acceptable standards of performance; communicate this information to students so they know what is expected of them.

Use instructional methods, procedures, and learning aids that are appropriate for the tasks being taught.

Define a sequence of learning and communicate the steps leading to successful completion; post a written schedule of activities.

Utilize positive reinforcement to increase the probability of appropriate behavior; utilize frequent and immediate reward systems.

Relate learning activities to each student's career plan and goals.

Develop rapport with students; communicate with them on a level that reflects respect for individuals.

Simulate the work environment in the classroom; use a reward and consequence system used in the world of work.

Provide students with information on how, when, and where to obtain assistance in areas such as counseling and financial aid.

Encourage all students to participate in class discussions and demonstrations; utilize active questioning techniques.

Design opportunities for students to succeed.

Select instructional objectives that are appropriate for each student.

Provide numerous opportunities for students to practice tasks in one area before moving on to new areas of instruction.

Reward students for making acceptable progress — not just for successful completion.

Provide sufficient time for teacher-directed, structured practice before students begin to work on their own.

Provide continuous, precise, and informative feedback to students as they perform tasks; don't just assign grades to completed projects.

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Anderson, Sandra L. (1982, December). Turning Around Junior Highs in the District of Columbia. *Educational Leadership*.

Edmonds, Ronald. (1982, December). On School Improvement: A Conversation with Ronald Edmonds. *Educational Leadership*.

Murphy, J. F., Weil, M., Hallinger, P., & Mitman, A. (1982, December). Academic Press: Translating High Expectations into School Policies and Classroom Practices. *Educational Leadership*.

Characteristics of Effective Programs

Directors of exemplary programs in the United States were asked to identify those characteristics considered to be the most important in retaining students in school. It is interesting to note that the four program descriptors selected as the most effective were all in the affective domain. In addition, a cluster of content characteristics were identified.

Affective Characteristics

Effective programs were found to focus on the development of:

- Self-concept improvement
- Interpersonal/life skills
- Positive work attitudes
- Motivation

Content Characteristics

Effective programs incorporated these aspects into the curriculum:

- Work experience
- Basic academic skills
- Employability skills
- Job training skills

Teaching Characteristics

Effective programs were characterized by the following teaching techniques:

- Rules were established and communicated
- Performance standards were clearly communicated
- Methods were appropriate for the tasks taught
- Content met student expectations
- Realistic training was provided
- A sequence of learning was defined and communicated

References

Batsche, Catherine. (1985). Indicators of Effective Programming for School to Work Transition Skills Among Dropouts. *The Journal for Vocational Special Needs Education. 7* (3).

Carvell, F. & Carvell, J. (1981). *A Study of the Non-traditional and Social Impact of Vocational Education on Individuals in Illinois.* Springfield, IL: Illinois State Board of Education, Department of Adult, Vocational, and Technical Education.

Lam, Y. & Wong, A. (1974). Attendance regularity of adult learners: An examination of content and structural factors. *Adult Education, 24*, 130-142.

Programmatic Considerations

Teachers and administrators can design programs to increase the probability that they will have an impact on student retention. Programmatic considerations that have been found to be effective in reducing dropout rates are described below.

Design courses that are realistic and representative of real life situations so that students can readily see the purpose and usefulness of what they are learning.

Integrate instruction in math and communication skills into programmatic units rather than teaching them in isolated units.

Create flexible scheduling alternatives to accommodate students who need to work part-time while attending school.

Provide for school to work transition skill development. Design the vocational program to emulate the conditions of the work environment.

Conduct inservice activities to help teachers identify potential dropouts and ask them to select a student to give special attention during the school year.

Evaluate programs to identify and correct potential problems that contribute to dropout rates.

Involve potential dropouts in leadership activities through vocational organizations and class responsibilities.

Involve students in small group work to encourage peer support and interaction.

Incorporate activities into the curriculum to encourage self-concept development, increase motivation, and refine independent living skills.

Programmatic Considerations (cont.)

Define the mission of the program and obtain commitment to the mission from students.

Implement competency-based instruction to ensure:

- learning outcomes are clearly defined
- the sequence of learning is communicated
- performance standards are clearly indicated
- realistic training is related to jobs

References

Murphy, J. F., Weil, M., Hallinger, P. & Mitman, A. (1982, December). Academic Press: Translating High Expectations into School Policies and Classroom Practices. *Educational Leadership*.

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Weber, J.M. & Silvani-Lacey, C. (1983). *Building Basic Skills: The Dropout*. Columbus, OH: The National Center for Research in Vocational Education.

The Illinois Response

Vocational education in Illinois has promoted numerous practices that respond to the needs identified by dropouts including:

Competency based education that is reality based;

Individualized Career Plans (ICP's) that relate instruction to student goals, interests, and needs;

Work-study and cooperative education opportunities;

Sequential vocational programs;

The WECEP program for potential dropouts;

The Early School Leaver Program.

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